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KGB power grows as Gorbachev gives it control of radio and TV

By Michael J. Bonafield
THE WASHINGTON TIMES FOREIGN SERVICE

GENEVA — The power and influence of the KGB in the Soviet government continues to grow in a "subtle, relentless fashion," say Western observers, who point to the announcement in Moscow that a secret police official has been named to run the country's important television and radio conglomerate.

Early this week, Tass, the Soviet news agency, confirmed that Alexander Aksenov, a senior KGB officer, had been tapped by party leader Mikhail Gorbachev to head the powerful SCTRB state committee on television and radio broadcasting.

Mr. Aksenov, 57, replaces 73-year-old Sergei Lapin, who Tass said is retiring.

The television and radio broadcasting committee is the linchpin that holds the Soviet Union's enormous telecommunications operations together.

In addition to broadcast facilities in all of the major cities, the committee oversees the administration of Novosti, the giant news combine that was founded by the KGB, and it controls all content of Soviet radio and television.

Radio Moscow, the ubiquitous mouthpiece of Soviet propaganda that broadcasts to every corner of the world in more than 100 languages and dialects, is also run by Mr. Aksenov's organization.

"There is no question but that the power of the KGB has been enhanced by [Mr. Aksenov's] appointment," said Elizabeth Teague, an expert on Soviet domestic political affairs at Radio Liberty in Munich, West Germany.

"It seems that Mr. Gorbachev is bringing back a lot of people who were enemies of [the late president Leonid] Brezhnev, and that includes a number of KGB personnel," she said.

"It appears to be a case of 'My enemy's enemies are my friends.' "

In the nine months that have passed since Mr. Gorbachev assumed power, the Soviet leadership has undergone major personnel changes.

Mr. Gorbachev's "purge" has been aimed primarily at the old Brezhnev cadres in the party apparatus and the government, but increasingly the replacements have come from the Committee for State Security, or KGB.

Since March, for example, the ruling Politburo has gained four new members — Viktor Chebrikov, Yegor Ligachev, Nikolai Ryzhkov and Eduard Shevardnadze — and two new candidate, or non-voting, members — Sergei Sokolov and Nikolai Talyzin.

With the exception of Messrs. Ligachev and Ryzhkov, all have backgrounds in the secret police apparatus.

Indeed, Mr. Chebrikov is director of the KGB.

An indication of the KGB's renewed prestige under Mr. Gorbachev's rule came last month when Mr. Chebrikov was selected to give the important "Revolution Day" speech commemorating the Bolshevik coup de main in 1917.

The last time a master of the KGB was chosen for this high honor was during the Stalin years, when Lavrenti Beria gave the keynote address.

Mr. Chebrikov's predecessor as director of the KGB, Vitali Fedorchuk, now runs the powerful Ministry of Internal Affairs, or MVD.

Like the KGB, which controls the paramilitary border guards and commands elite security troops, the MVD directs the regular police and militia, the urban fire-fighting force, and also has uniformed troops of its own.

The MVD also operates the forced-labor camps and colonies that make up the infamous "gulag archipelago," whose inmates number 4 million, and the vast civil-registry system that keeps tabs on the private lives of the population.

In addition to Mr. Aksenov, another KGB officer has recently risen to prominent position within the government bureaucracy.

Konstantin Katushev, who, like Mr. Aksenov, is a senior secret police officer, was recently picked to head the extremely important Ministry of Foreign Trade, an agency critical to the success of Mr. Gorbachev's ambitious plans to revitalize the economy.

Mr. Katushev was last posted to Moscow's embassy in Havana, and before that he occupied a pivotal job on the Secretariat of the Central Committee, which presides over the day-to-day operations of the Soviet government.

Mr. Gorbachev has, in the course of recasting the government and party leadership in his own mold, completely overhauled the Council of Ministers, the administrative body that sits atop the country's truly huge governing bureaucracy.

Of the 13 men who hold the chief executive positions in the 103-man council, six were appointed by Mr. Gorbachev, including the chairman, Mr. Ryzhkov.

Another two deputy chairmen have KGB backgrounds. They both were appointed by Mr. Gorbachev's predecessor, Konstantin Chernenko, but they rose through the bureaucracy under the patronage of Yuri Andropov, who for 15 years was chief of the KGB before becoming party leader on the death of Mr. Brezhnev in November 1982

"It will be interesting to observe how Ryzhkov's new 'KGB' team comes to grips with the country's staggering economic problems," said another Soviet analyst in Western Europe.

In addition to the key council of ministers and a number of separate and equally important ministries, Mr. Gorbachev has replaced 22 ministerial chiefs and 30 first secretaries of "oblast," or regional, and "krai," or territorial, party committees. People in these jobs nominally fulfill the role governors do in the U.S. political structure.

At the same time, he has appointed seven new heads of departments of the Communist Party Central Committee.

When the 27th Party Congress convenes in February 1986, a completely new Central Committee will

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be elected. Mr. Gorbachev is expected, according to many observers, to draw heavily upon the administrative ranks of the KGB for personnel to fill the slots he has not already attended to.

At present, the KGB, MVD and the military account for 26 members of the 219-strong Central Committee. Four years ago, as Mr. Brezhnev was in the final months of his life, the security-military apparatus counted only 19 Central Committee members.

"The KGB has penetrated the government in a very subtle, relentless fashion," said one U.S. observer here, "largely as a result of Andropov's influence over Gorbachev."

"When the next Party Congress finishes its business in February," he said, "don't be surprised if you count 30 or more KGB graduates among the Central Committee members."

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